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1. BACKGROUND

Many people living with disabilities and learning difficulties struggle to “find their place in the current economic structure”.

Over the last 18 years the NCEC has been exploring possible solutions to this challenge through the creation of a worker’s cooperative for people with learning difficulties, intellectual disabilities and mental health issues.

2. AIMS

Our research aimed to uncover the lived experiences of cooperative members in order to better understand the positive elements of the cooperative that resonate with members.

We aimed to document how and why the NCEC has been so successful in supporting disadvantaged groups through providing them with meaningful work opportunities. We subsequently identified key elements of the NCEC organisation that are relevant for other community owned enterprises and cooperatives.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the experiences of Cooperative Members within the Nundah Community Enterprise Cooperative?

- What are the positive elements of the cooperative for members?
- How does the cooperative foster meaningful work for its members?
- How does the cooperative foster social inclusion for its members?
- What are the member’s experiences of meaningful work and how does this effect their lives?
- How do members envision their future within the NCEC?

Core Concepts

Meaningful Work

Social Inclusion

Co-op Model

“Feeling good because you’ve done something for yourself and proud because you’ve done something for the community” - Clark

“Now I can make it because I know theres a couple of networks, in my life that I can rely on” - Brett

“when you need help you can just ask them... they can sit down and talk to you about it, and you really know that they’re listening” — Elliot

4. METHOD

We conducted 8 semi-structured interviews in September 2016 with NCEC members with a learning disability, intellectual disability or mental illness. Interviews utilised visual tools to explore the members’ experiences of work. Thematic analysis was used to code key theoretical and reoccurring themes.

5. OUR FINDINGS

The cooperative model is a valuable form of meaningful employment for people with a disability as it nourishes their sense of happiness, self worth, confidence, belonging and achievement.

- **A flexible and supportive environment** experienced through positive relationships with co-workers and supervisors, and their acceptance and understanding of disability.
- **The democratic values of the cooperative** facilitate the achievement of dreams by empowering member voices
- **Socially inclusive environment** helps members develop friendships.
- The extent to which members actively engage in the **organisational level of the cooperative** varies